
THE MYSTERY OF MARY

MOTHER
OF JESUS



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“My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.” —Luke 1:46–48



Can you imagine picking out your own mother before you were born?

Think about it. Would you pick a woman of means—perhaps a working mother who could help provide for all your material needs so that you would never be in want? Or would you pick a mom who, while perhaps not impoverished, might not be able to buy you everything you want, but who would always be around?

It’s almost a silly fantasy, isn’t it, to pick your own mother? Yet, strangely enough, this is exactly what Jesus did. What an enormous responsibility—to mother the Savior of the human race. Whomever Jesus picked would no doubt be a very special person. After all, she would be charged with carrying the incarnate God in her womb and caring for and guiding Him through childhood. It’s a staggering task, and I don’t know who would have the courage to volunteer for the job. Who has a good enough resumé to raise Jesus? Being a mother is hard enough, right?

Well, Jesus picked a young woman named Mary.

As we consider this special person in the history of the world, so many questions come to mind. How did Jesus go about choosing her? I don’t think He merely lined up a bunch of Hebrew girls and went *eeny, meeny, miny, moe!* It was an extremely serious decision, so what made her so special that God would entrust the life of Jesus to her? How did it change her life—and our lives?

It’s not a surprise, then, that Mary has taken a special place in the annals of our faith. Even before she gave birth, she knew that generations far beyond her time would know her name and her special role. (See Luke 1:46–48.) This wasn’t arrogance on her part; it was a simple statement of fact. When God intervenes in human history, nothing is more important. In fact, God certainly intended us to know about the most famous and beloved mother in all of history,

so it requires our special attention and study, and that's what this brief book sets out to do.

When Jesus chose Mary, He picked somebody who would be a part of the story of salvation. Who was this special woman, and what can we learn about her from the Scriptures? Let's find out ...

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Did you know that the name "Mary" is the most popular name for females in the United States? The U.S. Census Bureau indicates that the name is twice as popular as choice number two, which happens to be Patricia at this time of publication. It's not a stretch of the imagination to conclude that the name Mary is so popular because of its prominent place in Scripture—you don't know a lot of people named Jezebel, do you? Mary is a special character in the Bible; her high calling draws us to her story.

While we choose—or don't choose, as it were—names because of what they represent, the name Mary is something of an enigma. Mary is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Miriam. (The Latin form is Maria.) There are many other variations as well, such as Marie.

The first time you find a "Mary" in the Bible, it's through the story of Miriam in the Old Testament. The name "Miriam" can mean rebellious, strong, stubborn, or resistant. It might mean "stubborn waters" or "strong waters" or "waters of strength." Scholars are not exactly sure. It might not have been strictly Hebrew either, but Egyptian. Indeed, Miriam had a brother whose name was Moses, which was very much an Egyptian name. There are pharaohs named Moses, such as Tut-Moses.

The Egyptian word "Mir" means love or beloved. So, does Miriam mean rebellious, which fits the years the Israelites were wandering in the desert, or does it mean beloved? We do know that one of Miriam's primary roles was to preserve her brother, who would someday be her savior. In a similar way, Mary was to preserve Jesus, who was also to be her Savior.

MARY'S FAMILY TREE

One of the most intriguing aspects of Mary is her genealogy; she has a remarkable and prophetic pedigree. As you probably know, Jesus

was born of the house of David. As you study the two genealogies of Christ in the Bible, you'll see at the end of Matthew's genealogy, it says, "And *Jacob* begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ" (Matthew 1:16, my emphasis). But in Luke's genealogy it says, "Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of *Heli*" (Luke 3:23, my emphasis).

Matthew traces Jesus' lineage down through Joseph, "the son of Jacob." Luke follows it down through Joseph, "the son of Heli." Why the difference? Is it a contradiction—an error? We need to take a closer look at this difference to see that it actually reveals something special. Indeed, listing Mary in the genealogy was a very uncommon thing to do in the Jewish world—but the Bible goes a step further.

Some commentators indicate that Heli's father—Mattan or Mathan, possibly the same person with a slight variation of spelling—could have had two boys: Heli and Jacob. If that is the case, the two were obviously brothers. So it is possible to understand Matthew's and Luke's discrepancy by concluding that Heli was the father of Mary and Jacob was the father of Joseph. It was not uncommon in Bible times for a person to marry a first cousin or even a sister-in-law. In fact, a biblical law dictated the importance of preserving a family inheritance by marrying a daughter of the land if there was no son to inherit it. "And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel shall be the wife of one of the family of her father's tribe, so that the children of Israel each may possess the inheritance of his fathers" (Numbers 36:8). If Heli's only child was Mary, then in order to keep the inheritance in that family, Joseph would have needed to marry her.

Joseph probably married Mary because his first wife had died. This reference in Numbers explains how she very well could have married "within her father's tribe" and how she too could be from the house of David. Mary had royal blood.

How old was Mary when she married? Some commentators suggest she was only 13 or 14 years old, believing that people always married really young in those days. But she could have been as old as 18 or 19, and I believe her maturity and grace belie the notion that she was barely past her pre-teen years. (From what we know about Joseph, it appears he was considerably older than Mary when they married.)

During Christ's young and tender years, Mary had an incredible responsibility to teach Jesus. Would God put His Son in the hands of a flighty or ignorant human being? I think she was very educated and could read. We shouldn't underestimate what a mother can do.

Suzanna Wesley, whose father was a pastor, was likewise well educated. She and her husband Samuel had 19 children. She was very gifted and so influential in the lives of her children that she is called the "mother of Methodism," since two of her boys grew up to lead this movement—Charles and John Wesley. She taught her boys to read Scripture by the time they were five!

Though it wasn't common for girls to go to the synagogue where boys were taught, Mary might have learned to read at home from her father. Just imagine the responsibility she had of raising and training the Messiah. How seriously would you take raising your children if one of them was the Son of God? Should it make any difference? You might think, "Well, I'm just raising your garden-variety sinner. I don't need to worry about it." We should think of all under our care as God's sons and daughters. We should earnestly ask, as I'm sure Mary did, for the Holy Spirit to guide us as parents. I can imagine that it was from Mary's own lips that Christ first heard the teachings of the Old Testament Scriptures.

HIGHLY FAVORED

It's clear that even in the most indirect sense, the Bible writers believed Mary to be a special figure in history. But God's own opinion of Mary comes in the most direct way possible—through an angelic messenger sent personally by the Lord:

"The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, 'Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!' " (Luke 1:26–28).

Notice how the angel was sent by God to a particular region and city. Nazareth was a town many considered to be on the wrong side of the tracks, yet a betrothed virgin living there was highly favored by God.

“But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end’ ” (Luke 1:29–33).

Who wouldn’t be troubled by such a visit? Mary certainly was, yet the angel sensed her gentle heart and told her not to be afraid. He even called her by name. Gabriel again assured her that she had found favor with God. Wouldn’t you like to know from the lips of an angel that God found favor with you? It’s the experience Mary had, and I’m sure one she never forgot.

And then she received the big news—she would conceive and give birth to a Son who would be called Jesus. Furthermore, this Son of the Highest would be given the throne of David and would reign over the house of Jacob. His kingdom would never end.

There is deep prophetic significance to this announcement to Mary. Every Jewish mother from Abraham—indeed, every mother since Eve—knew that someday the Seed of the woman would be born (Genesis 3:15). God would come to earth in the form of a man to be a clear revelation of God’s will; He would ultimately be our Substitute and Savior. These are the three big reasons that Jesus came: to show us the Father, to be our example, and to ultimately trade places with us to take our suffering, to take our sin, and to give us His goodness. He gave us His strength and took our weakness in order to make this exchange.

But He would have to be born first. He would have to be loved and raised, and God found a woman who, with humility and grace, accepted His high calling: “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (v. 38).

However, I’m afraid there are some errant teachings about Mary that have become popular and unfortunately diminish the profound saving work of our Savior.

MARY IN MYTH

There are more misunderstandings and myths about Mary than any other mother in history. So whenever the understanding of the role and mystery of Mary comes up, it's necessary to pause and clarify her role from Scripture. She is certainly a Bible character that deserves our attention. Yet there are a few churches that take a solemn, healthy respect for the character of Mary too far. In essence, they deify this humble human being.

I have already clearly established that Mary was chosen by God and is a tremendous person worthy of our study. I expect to see her in the kingdom of heaven; I can't wait to ask her what it was like to be chosen to give birth to the Messiah. But are we to venerate her and treat her as a kind of goddess? Indeed, Mary—often called the Queen of Heaven—has been exalted by some to be on a level with God and, by extension, the Trinity. They even think we should pray to her.

I believe that in doing so, they lessen the work and importance of Jesus. Furthermore, it really does a great disservice to Mary and her story. It makes a person with whom we can identify into someone who is beyond our comprehension.

Yet once you understand how real and normal Mary was, if God could help her conceive and raise the most important person who ever lived, there is also hope for us. But if Mary was a supermom, what hope does it give to the rest of us?

Let's take a moment to demystify some popular but false conceptions of Mary by analyzing by the Scriptures those characteristics and powers that have been attributed to her.

THE NATURE OF MARY

As a child, I used to believe that the Immaculate Conception was about Jesus being born of Mary, but it's not about Christ's conception at all—it's about Mary's conception. Some say Mary was born in the womb of her mother but was not tainted by a doctrine called "original sin."

"The Immaculate Conception is a dogma of the Catholic Church maintaining that from the moment when she was conceived in the womb, the Blessed Virgin Mary was kept free of original sin and

was filled with the sanctifying grace normally conferred during baptism. It is one of the four dogmas in Roman Catholic Mariology. ... The Immaculate Conception should not be confused with the perpetual virginity of Mary or the virgin birth of Jesus; it refers to the conception of Mary by her mother, Saint Anne.”

Moreover,

“The proclaimed Roman Catholic dogma states ‘that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin’ ”¹

While Mary would have been a godly woman, how many humans does the Bible say were ever sinless? Only one—Jesus Christ. (See 1 Peter 2:21, 22.) Otherwise, the Bible makes it very clear that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). That would include some of the other most cherished and mighty Bible figures—Daniel, John the Baptist, Elijah, and Elisha.

While I agree each and every person here was a holy man or woman, Mary was still human and, therefore, she sinned. Like you and I, Mary needed the redemptive sacrifice of her Child. Some insist that Mary had to be sinless because Jesus couldn’t be tainted by sin.

Can a pure white lily grow out of a murky swamp? Yes. And Mary being a sinner could still give birth to a perfect child.

In fact Mary herself confesses her need for a Savior:

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46, 47).

If Mary were sinless, why would she need a Savior? She needed forgiveness just like you and I do.

Where did the Immaculate Conception dogma arise? Why was it invented? The primary reason is from a misunderstanding of the nature of Jesus. You might have heard the question asked in this way: “When Jesus was born, did He have the nature of Adam before Adam fell into sin or after the fall?” As you are aware, Adam and Eve did not have an engrained propensity toward evil. When they were first created, they weren’t motivated by selfishness. After they sinned, they became enslaved to the tendencies toward self. So when Jesus was

born, did He have the attributes of Adam's nature before or after the fall?

People have debated this question for centuries. Some say Jesus had the nature of Adam before the fall, so He really didn't have the attraction to sin like we have. The problem with this view is that Jesus cannot then be our example on how to overcome sin. How can Christ be born with this "advantage" and yet be "in all points tempted" as our High Priest who can "sympathize with our weaknesses"? (Hebrews 4:15).

Instead, it seems biblical to conclude that Jesus took the nature that Adam had after the fall, yet He was without sin. Let's face it—many things about Jesus' makeup are a mystery! But why else would the Bible go through all of the trouble to list the genealogy of Jesus with all of the sordid characters in His family tree? God wanted us to know that Jesus was as fully human as He was fully God.

Moreover, if Jesus had the nature of Adam before the fall, would he not have some of the physical characteristics of Adam? How tall was Adam? Some scholars say that people before the flood had a mighty stature, perhaps 18 feet in height! Physically, Jesus inherited the body of the people of His time—or the Bible certainly would have let us know. In fact, the Bible says the exact opposite of Jesus: "He had no form or comeliness that we should look upon him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (see Isaiah 53).

Did Jesus have any DNA from Mary? I believe He did. Could it be that when you looked at Jesus and then looked at Mary, you would see some similarities? It seems natural and biblical to assume it.

Christ was both human and divine. Sometimes we try to make Him so divine that we forget that He really can relate to us. Jesus is even called our elder Brother (Hebrews 2:17). We have a human family connection to Him. That means Christ did not resist sin and temptation with anything that is not available to you and me. He can provide us with the same victory that He had. The devil claims that fallen people cannot obey, yet Jesus obeyed, having the fallen nature of Adam. Christ's life disproves the claims of Satan. We, too, may obey through the same help Jesus received. He truly is our Example in all things.

If we make Mary out to be perfect because Jesus had to be totally

untouched by sin, what hope does it leave us mere humans to overcome a sin in our life? It is interesting to think that Jesus, who was born in her, had to recreate Mary just like He recreates us. What started out as a miraculous birth within her resulted in her need to have the miraculous “born again” experience that every Christian needs. Mary had to look to the cross the same way you and I look to the cross. I’m sure she grew and went through a metamorphosis in her experience just like all Christians who ask Jesus to live in their hearts. We destroy this precious symbolism by making Mary something she is not.

THE MARY OF THE BIBLE

Was Mary divine? Some have suggested that Mary is more than a human who was miraculously conceived. They believe that she shares an equal place with Jesus in heaven—a person who is both human and divine.

Yet the Bible seems to make it abundantly clear Mary was just like any other person. She was very much human.

We need to be absolutely sure about this—and it’s a sad fact that this teaching was born from pagan beliefs. It’s blasphemy to call something God that isn’t God, and the goddess myth of Mary has tragically filtered down into our faith. Its roots are in Babylon, when Cush married Semiramis, who claimed to be both divine and human, and who begat Nimrod. When Nimrod grew up, he married Semiramis. They also had a child by incest. In the ancient art of those days, we often find images of a mother nursing a baby conceived by the gods. Images of Jesus being held by Mary were copied from these pagan sources.

I believe that the deification of Mary is what the devil has always planned. In Genesis 3:15, God promises the Messiah to the world. The devil sought to counteract this truth about Jesus by counterfeiting it in advance. We see this paganism in false gods like Ishtar, Tammuz, Aphrodite, and Horus. These are mere idols, yet these pagan ideas invaded the church to deify Mary, who was very real and very human.

How do we know from the Bible that Mary was human?

For one, when Jesus turned 12 years old, His family went up to Jerusalem to the Passover (Luke 2:41). Large groups traveled together

on these big pilgrimages. It was like a large parade with hundreds of people moving along as a crowd. People saw friends and family and spent time socializing along the way.

Joseph and Mary trusted Jesus as they traveled. He was an obedient and helpful child, not the type of boy who got into trouble the moment you turned your head. He was so obedient and compliant that in the journey back home, they didn't really worry about Him when He didn't show up for supper. They assumed He was somewhere safe with their kin. They actually got a day and-a-half down the road before they started to frantically search for Him. They'd lost track of Him and had to retrace their steps. Can you envision being entrusted with the Son of God, the national treasure, and then losing Him?

The searching parents finally found their child in the temple, sitting at the feet of scholars. He was listening to them and also asking them such profound questions that the religious teachers were dumbfounded that this child could be so perceptive and intuitive.

Mary asked Jesus, "Son, why have You done this to us?" (Luke 2:48). It is true that He was her Son, but His answer is revealing. She basically said, "Your father and I have sought you anxiously. You're supposed to stay with us. We're your parents!" When a Jewish boy turned 12 years old in those days, he went through a religious ceremony called a bar mitzvah. It was a turning point when the young boy was recognized as a man. In this context, Jesus firmly yet kindly responded to His earthly parents, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (v. 49). He was letting His mother and father know His relationship to them had changed. In essence He was saying, "I am your child, I have been committed to your care, but now I understand My responsibility to My heavenly Father."

When Jesus attended His first Passover as a 12-year-old, I believe it dawned on His mind that the lamb He saw slain was His life calling. He was trying to explain to His parents, "My primary calling is not to be in submission to My earthly father and mother, but to My heavenly Father. I'm yours, but I'm not really yours. I am the Son of God. Joseph is my father, but I have another Father." That must have been an epiphany for Mary.

This little story also tells us that Mary wasn't omniscient, or all-knowing, a characteristic of the divine. When Jesus asked her if she

“knew,” it was clear she didn’t know. She didn’t know everything, and she was often shocked and surprised by events related to Jesus.

Indeed, in Matthew 13:55, we read, “Is this [Jesus] not the carpenter’s son? *Is not His mother called Mary?* And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?” (my emphasis). Had the people in the Bible known Mary to be something divine, they certainly don’t indicate that fact here in this passage. Had she been a miracle worker, they might have said, “Oh, yes—this is Mary’s child; no wonder He also works miracles.” But far from that, they seemed to think His family was absolutely ordinary. Mary was a normal person like us, who, at one point, even seemed to have doubted Jesus’ manner of fulfilling His mission, as we’ll see in a little bit.

MARY’S RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

The Bible records these revealing words in Luke 2:17–19:

“Now when [the shepherds] had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But *Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart*” (my emphasis).

The word “ponder” here is another way to say she “wondered.” She knew something was special about her child, but she didn’t know what exactly. She wasn’t all knowing. Again, in Luke 2:33, the Bible explains that Mary “marveled” at what others said about Jesus. Even though she was given a prophetic picture of Jesus, she was still thunderstruck, much like the special but all-too-human disciples. Mary had doubts like Moses had doubts—all very human responses.

After Jesus grew into adulthood, He was baptized in the Jordan River by his cousin John the Baptist. I’m sure Mary must have been excited. You can sense this in her through the little story regarding the wedding feast in the town of Cana.

Wedding feasts sometimes lasted a week in those days. And as often happens today, the host of that wedding hadn’t planned for the number of people who showed up. It was only the third day of the celebration, and they ran out of grape juice. So Mary approached Jesus to say, “They have no wine” (John 2:3).

Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come” (v. 4). When He called her “woman,” it was not a disrespectful way to speak to mothers in Bible times. It was equivalent to being called “Madam.”

Yet while Christ was respectful to His mother, the term He used to address her created some separation. He didn’t call her “mother” or even “Mary.” Some churches venerate Mary to an exalted position, but in this example, we find Christ doing nothing to exalt Mary. In fact, He seems to mildly rebuke her by saying, “My time has not yet come.” Mary then turns to the servants and says, “Whatever He says to you, do it” (v. 5). He was letting Mary know He was no longer under her thumb. He had obeyed the commandment to honor His father and mother perfectly, but after 30 years, He was saying He was to be especially about his heavenly Father’s business. He distanced Himself from her.

Christ then turned the water into wine for the guests to enjoy. Again, the focus on the Bible story is Jesus, not Mary. Christ came to give us His pure life, symbolized by grape juice. In exchange, Jesus took our sinfulness onto Himself, just like the sour wine was offered to Him on the cross. The Bible is filled with powerful symbols about Jesus—it’s not asking us to focus on Mary, but totally on Him.

Another short incident between Mary and Jesus, found in Luke 8, reinforces this relationship. “Then His mother [Mary] and brothers came to Him, and could not approach Him because of the crowd. And it was told Him by some, who said, ‘Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You’ ” (Luke 8:19, 20). Perhaps Jesus was teaching inside Peter’s home and someone slipped Him a piece of paper with the note: “Son, I really would like to speak with you.”

In light of how some people uphold Mary on a level with Christ, the reply of Jesus in this setting is very interesting. You might think, if Mary was the “Mother of God,” Christ would drop everything and quickly exit the house. But the Bible says differently. “He answered and said to them, ‘My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it’ ” (v. 21).

Jesus does not identify Mary as a sinless saint or goddess to be worshiped. Anyone who seeks to do the will of God can be part of the family of God. We cannot set the mother of Jesus apart from other

people! Certainly we should honor her, but not venerate her. Like all of us, Mary needs the Savior in her life. Any other teaching takes away from Jesus.

DID MARY HAVE OTHER CHILDREN?

Another dogma about Mary is that she was perpetually a virgin, even after having Jesus. This is supposed to separate her from the human race, to deify her existence, in that she was untainted by normal human biological needs or actions.

First, this gives the unbiblical impression that sex is somehow sinful. It's possibly a misinterpretation of the Scripture that says, "In sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). It's the same teaching that has led to the celibacy restriction in the Catholic priesthood, but God says that marriage is good and "the bed is undefiled" (Hebrews 13:4).

But more to the point, the Bible makes it abundantly clear that Mary and Joseph certainly knew each other intimately in the physical sense. Matthew 1:24, 25 says,

"Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her *till* she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus" (my emphasis).

The word "till" here is very important. It makes it clear that most people would have known that Joseph and Mary were intimate with each other, so the Bible clarifies that it only happened after their son was born. It very much insinuates they ended up having a normal married life afterward. And why wouldn't they?

At the same time, it doesn't mean that Mary had other children. The Bible tells us that Jesus had at least six siblings. Four brothers are actually named, as we read in Matthew 13:55. While the names of His sisters are not mentioned, the Bible uses the plural word "sisters" (v. 56), so there were at least two girls.

It is likely that Joseph had six other children before he married Mary. That means all of Jesus' siblings were older stepbrothers and stepsisters. If this were true, then it appears Mary gave birth to only one child, Jesus. How could this be?

In Bible times, it would have been considered very disrespectful for

Jesus to leave the family business and become an itinerant preacher after Joseph died, especially if He was the oldest of the siblings. It was always the youngest who was more free to leave home. The oldest was supposed to get a double inheritance and take over the family business. In the parable of the prodigal son, which son left home? The younger one.

Another reason it appears that Christ was the youngest brother is the way His older brothers related to Him. There is more than one instance where you read of Jesus' siblings trying to tell Him what to do during His ministry (see Mark 3:31). Younger brothers would not relate this way toward an eldest brother in the Hebrew culture.

Additionally, the fact that Joseph had died by the time Jesus began his earthly ministry supports the view that he was substantially older than Mary, having already had a prior family.

One more incident in Scripture seems to show that Jesus was the only child born of Mary. When Christ hung dying on the cross, He committed the care of His mother to the disciple John. Why not to one of Mary's children? Likely it is because she had no other blood children. It suggests that Mary was probably a stepmother to the others.

The Bible's lack of reference to Mary's other children is an argument that she didn't have another child by Joseph, not that she didn't have a normal, healthy marriage relationship with her husband. It's a bit of a stretch to say she was perpetually a virgin, and it's a dogma that has no basis in the Bible.

When a pope speaks from the throne as vicar of God, it's saying that his words are above Scripture—it's dogma, not Bible doctrine. Errant beliefs about Mary came from this sort of teaching, as each century the church gradually exalted Mary higher and higher. They would even dub her "Mary, Mother of God." It's not really appropriate to give her that name that sounds superior to the Creator. God is infinite; it is only by a divine act that a finite being was chosen to be the surrogate for the everlasting God. You can't technically be the mother of the Creator; it seems to suggest that God had a beginning.

Instead, Mary was responsible for the human side of Christ; the Holy Spirit, of course, was responsible for the divine part of Jesus.

HOW WE RELATE TO MARY

We can see that Mary was very much human, just like you and me. So outside of having a healthy respect for this blessed godly person of God, how should we relate to Mary on a spiritual level? Should we worship her? Should we pray to her?

In Matthew 2:11, the wise men arrived at Joseph's household and presented their gifts to Jesus. They worshiped Jesus. If there was any sense that Mary deserved adoration, it's likely we would have read about it here. Instead, we read that Mary was perplexed by the attention given to her child. Mary would have worshiped Jesus also and would have rebuked anyone bowing down to her or a likeness of her. You simply need to read Exodus 20, which says, "You shall have no gods before Me, and do not bow down to idols," to know how Mary felt.

What about prayer? Should we pray to Mary? Where in the Bible are we commanded to do such a thing? More than a billion people in the world do so without any biblical support, as though she is divine. Pope John Paul addressed a shrine to Mary in June 1999, saying, "Hail, Daughter of God the Father, Mother of the Son of God, Bride of the Holy Spirit, and Temple of the Trinity." On what basis did the pope do this? Certainly not the Bible.

In fact, Jesus specifically taught people to pray in Matthew chapter 6: "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name" (v. 9). We are to pray directly to the Father. In fact, we don't need any intercessor other than Jesus! Many people believe that since God commands a vast universe, it's hard to hear every prayer, thus praying to Mary might get you a better audience. But this insinuates that God isn't really godlike, doesn't it?

God can hear you, and when you pray in Jesus' name, you don't need anything else. Jesus stands for you; why would you need Mary when you have Jesus? Praying to or before a statue of Mary is actually breaking the commandment against idols. While I'm sure God hears these sincere prayers before statues of Mary, He would rather you go into a closet and speak to Him directly. Hebrews 4:15, 16, says, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may

obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

We can go straight to Jesus, boldly before God, to receive forgiveness. To suggest that we might need Mary to be heard by God insinuates that the Lord is not all-knowing or is disinterested in our prayers. Moreover, Matthew 6:6 says to not pray in vain repetition. This would include the Hail Mary. You won’t get credit for praying over and over again. Jesus was very clear about it!

But one other Bible teaching conflicts with the idea of praying to Mary. The Scriptures clearly show that when a person dies, they are in the grave until the resurrection. “For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten” (Ecclesiastes 9:5). And, “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:15, 16).

Jesus compares death to sleep (John 11:11–14). Just as God created people from the dust of the earth, so to the earth will they return (Genesis 2:7 and Ecclesiastes 12:7) until the resurrection (John 5:28, 29). That means Mary is still in the grave, awaiting the resurrection morning at the second coming of Christ. You cannot communicate with the dead. In fact, the Bible condemns those who attempt to speak with the deceased (Deuteronomy 18:10–15). Mary is not an intercessor for Christ because she can’t be, physically or spiritually —“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

ASSUMING AN ASSUMPTION?

Another teaching about Mary that might be used to get around the fact that Mary is now sleeping in Jesus is that the Lord came down to earth with angels to pick up Mary after she died. They say that if Moses was resurrected, why not Mary? Well, we don’t have to assume that Moses was raised from the dead, because the Bible, in the book of Jude, tells us directly that he was. However, it is totally silent on the notion that Mary was assumed into heaven.

And now, as deceptions always do, it has gone way too far. The

same teaching suggests that she is now by the throne of Jesus, a part of a holy quartet rather than a worshiper of the Holy Godhead. It's blasphemous theology because it's totally outside the Bible.

Still, we know that Jesus loved Mary, even if He hasn't come down to resurrect her just yet. The last act of His life was caring for His mother, committing her to John, His trusted disciple, who took Mary into his own household. I believe that Mary is probably buried around Antioch somewhere, because that's where John went. We know that she will be raised with Peter, James, and John, who are all waiting in a dreamless, peaceful sleep. "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:3).

Many believe that Mary blesses the human race, but rather, she was blessed by God. The idea we should pray to Mary and that she has the power to bless us with gifts is unbiblical. Luke 1:48 says that "all nations would call her blessed," but she is not the one who blesses. We have the same opportunities as Mary to be blessed; scores of people in the Bible were also blessed. We were certainly blessed with what Mary did, but she's not dispensing divine blessings today. She can't! Instead, it is Jesus who blesses, because He is alive: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

So in light of all these Bible truths, what are we to make of all those visions of Mary across the globe? Well, I agree that some genuine people might be seeing something appear before them, but it's not Mary. I believe this because I believe the Bible teaches that when someone dies, they remain in the grave.

It's very dangerous, then, to go before a statue and ask a blessing from Mary. Remember, the devil himself can appear as an angel of light. Is it possible that the devil will use visions of Mary to guide people away from God? The book of Revelation says the devil will do this powerfully. There are few figures in history that are as beloved as Mary—not only do Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox believers love Mary, she is beloved by Muslims. Did you know that Mary is the only female addressed by name in the Koran? Her unifying presence could be a positive influence in the spiritual world, but outside the context of the Bible, it could be exceedingly difficult

and deceptive. That's why the Bible must be our final guide in all matters of faith.

Many false teachings are directly attributed to Mary. In one vision, she's purported to have said, "I want the lay people to obey the pope, bishops, and all the priests. They are my most beloved sons and have received the power to forgive sins. ... For this reason, even my Son Jesus comes down from Heaven to earth in obedience to them" (*Tabloid*, "Mary's Touch," September 24, 1994). Only Jesus has the power to forgive sins, and Jesus is subject to no one's orders here on earth. Do you see the biblical problems this can create? If anyone can attribute a teaching to Mary, how can we know what is true? That's why God gave us the Bible, to share what His Son teaches us.

So you don't need to be confused or deceived by false teachings or erroneous apparitions of Mary. Never forget that God knows your heart, so you don't need to go through Mary. She can't hear your prayers; she is peacefully asleep in the Lord, waiting for His soon return.

MARY'S PIERCED HEART

There is an interesting event that took place eight days after Christ was born. Jesus was circumcised and brought to the temple in Jerusalem to be dedicated to the Lord as a firstborn son, as all Jewish firstborn males were to be presented. Joseph and Mary traveled from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, about seven miles away, where Jesus was registered in the temple.

There is prophetic significance to this event that goes deeper than the simple occurrence. Since a woman in prophecy represents the church (see Jeremiah 6:2), we see in this portrait of Mary a connection between the church and Jesus. Mary is a type, a symbol, of the church, and Christ is the head of the church. If I were to pick a woman to be my mother, I would pick someone who would bring me to church. Christ and the church still need to come together.

Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple where He was dedicated. In the church I pastor, we dedicate children to the Lord when they are young. Now this is different from baptism. Dedication is the parents' choice for their child. Baptism must be the individual's choice. I don't believe it's appropriate to baptize babies because they need to first

repent from their sins, confess them, and believe on Christ. Babies obviously cannot do these things. But parents can still dedicate them to God and ask for the Lord's blessing on their children.

When Jesus was brought to the temple, they met Simeon, one of the priests. Simeon had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would see the Messiah before he died. In this context, he says,

“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,
According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation
Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to
bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people
Israel” (Luke 2:29–32).

After sharing this beautiful prayer, Simeon turns to bless the family, but specifically addresses Mary with these prophetic words: “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Not only does Simeon predict that there will be resistance to Christ and opposition to His mighty work, but a sword would pierce Mary's own heart. It is interesting to note that in Bible prophecy, a sword represents the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17 and Hebrews 4:12). How was Mary's heart pierced by a sword? People in her time believed that someday the Messiah would come and conquer the Romans. Even Jesus' own disciples spoke of using swords to resist Rome (Luke 22:38). People misunderstood Christ's point about swords; the Lord is speaking of the power of the Word of God.

Mary's hoped that her Son, the Messiah, would destroy the Romans and set Israel free. But her heart would be pierced when she herself saw Jesus die on Calvary. Her heart would be broken and her hopes dashed of seeing Christ sit on a temporal throne in Jerusalem.

I believe Mary's heart would also be pierced today if she knew about all the undue exaltation given to her. Mary was a real person in history. She was 100 percent human; she was zero percent divine. While this shakes a lot of people because they believe Mary to be on par with the divine, she would be devastated to know that she's been placed on the pedestal of a goddess that began with ancient Babylon. The conquering sword she would no doubt point us to is the Word of

the Lord piercing into our own hearts to convict us of sin and help us see our need for cleansing. She would point us to Jesus; as John the Baptist said, she would seek to decrease so that Jesus could increase in our lives (John 3:30).

ASSURANCE OF HEAVEN

How do we get to heaven? Can Mary help us get there? The Bible says,

- “Through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:18).
- “He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25).
- “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Jesus makes intercession because He paid it all. He said, “Come to me, all you who are weary.” All of us, just like Mary, can live Spirit-filled lives. Jesus is not too busy to hear you; He wants to hear your prayers. He looks down and longs to hear you pray to Him just as if you are the only soul on earth for which He died. Jesus is the ladder between heaven and earth. He came to earth as a man to reconcile us to God. In His name, we access God and His salvation.

The story of Mary can be our story. Her experience of having Christ miraculously come alive within her can be ours. Just as the mother of Jesus was chosen to receive the Holy Spirit within her womb, so we may receive Jesus within our hearts. Mary is transformed. The One who she nurtures ends up nurturing her.

When you have a new birth experience, you will grow on the sincere milk of the Word (1Peter 2:2), you will nurture Christ within you until He transforms your whole life. You will move from receiving the Word to proclaiming the Word. Mary, the mother of Jesus, became Mary, the follower of Jesus. You also may have the miracle of new birth within your heart when you receive Jesus. It’s a transformation Christ wants to have in your life, even if you’ve been deceived or have misunderstood the biblical role of Mary. You can thank God—now He has shown you the truth. It will set you free!

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